1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1961 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

228 The captain watches the whole procedure closely to see that no pearls are secreted; when the last oyster is opened, he collects all the pearls, ties them in a small red cotton flannel cloth, and puts them in his sea chest on the poop deck.

The Persian Gulf procedure for opening the oysters is in vivid contrast to the practice of some of the other pearl fisheries. In Ceylon, for example, all the oysters for any one day are brought into the yards of the company holding the concession to the banks. Each diver carries his own oysters up to the stockaded compound where he divides them into three piles. The company inspector comes around and tells the diver which pile he can take; when he leaves the compound he has to give back a portion to his attendant and to the captain of the boat.

There is evidence that some such practice may have been carried out along the Arabian coast in the past. A century ago the pearlers of the Trucial Coast opened their oysters on land, for Whitelock relates that the pearlers remained at sea until they had a boatload of oysters and then proceeded to the nearest island to open the shells.[22]

228 172 During medieval times the Arabians on the mainland controlled Bahrein Island; their capital was at Hofuf. Huge heaps of oyster shells, some a hundred yards long, stretch along the shore a mile south of al-Khobar. Nearby have been found grinding pestles, stone diving weights, and crude pottery fragments. The species of oyster in these mounds is the same small variety commonly found today. When the refinery at Ras Tanura was being built, a low hill was leveled by bulldozers. Cutting through many ancient graves they turned up a stone diving weight among the numerous bones and pottery. Between Jubail and Ras Tanura, several more ancient shell heaps have been located high on the beach. Some of these are composed *entirely* of the large plate-sized species of pearl oysters; now this species is found only occasionally.

MARKETING AND DIVISION OF PROFITS

228 437 The majority of pearls are sold to Bombay merchants, but frequently brokers in search of a bargain will buy the best before

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

the dhows leave the banks. These men wander through the fleet in their own boats (usually launches) always trying to get to a first quality pearl before the other brokers hear of it, and always hoping that the *nakhoda* will not recognize its value. The broker's paraphenalia consists of a magnifying glass, a small hand balance, weights, and a set of brass screens for grading the pearls. When pearls are sold on the banks they are ceremoniously transferred from the captain's red bunting to the broker's.

Regardless of where they are sold, the majority of the pearls go to Bombay, and from Bombay eventually to Paris, the world's pearl emporium. Pearls are usually shipped to Bombay by air. The reason is simple: Usury and insurance are prohibited by the Quran. If the pearls were shipped to India by Arab dhow or steamer through an Arab agent, there could be no insurance on the consignment. However, if the pearls are shipped via Trans World Airline or British Overseas Airlines Corporation, the pearls can be heavily insured. Thus, the Arabs use a Western agency to get around the Quranic prohibition. In Bombay, Indian workers skillfully pierce the pearls with fine bow-driven drills and string them on silk, graded according to color and size. The pearls are sold to European dealers in bunches consisting of a number of strings and generally known as "Bombay bunches."

When the season has ended and the pearls are sold, the captain deducts the cost of the food and provisions. What is left represents the profit. Of this the owner of the dhow gets one-half; of the remainder each diver and each attendant gets one share and the captain two. Most of the dhows leaving Saudi Arabian ports are small (not over 40 feet) with small crews—usually something like 6 divers, 4 attendants, and a captain. Thus, each diver and attendant would get one twenty-fourth (about 4 percent) of the profits, and the captain would get one twelfth (about 8 percent). The pearling dhows operating out of Bahrein and Kuwait are generally much larger than the Saudi Arabian dhows, and may have crews of 40 or more. The profits of these craft are split in much the same way as the profits on smaller dhows, but the captain gets more shares with these larger crews than he does with the smaller.